

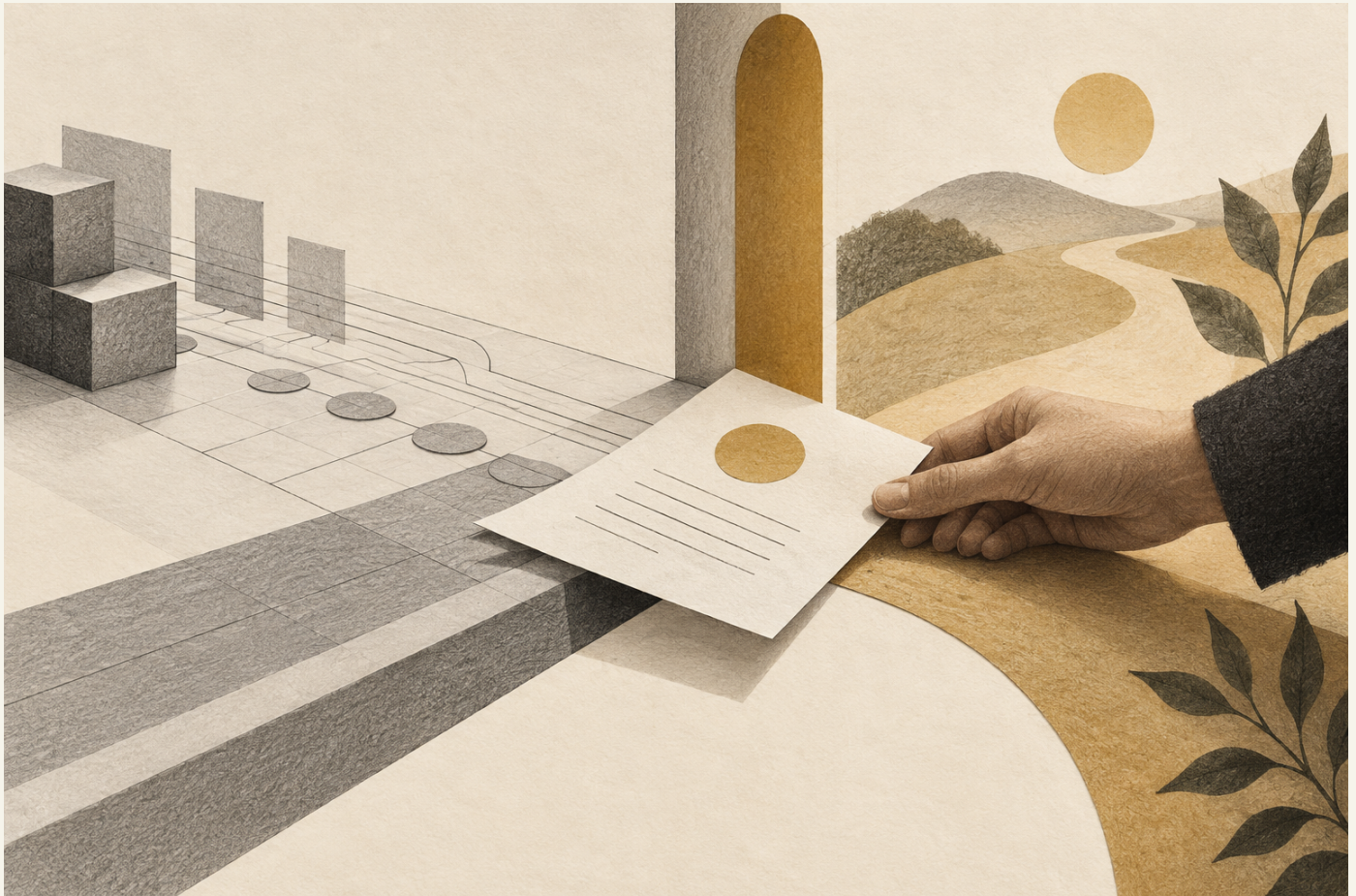


THE SIGNAL BRIEF / WORK DESIGN

# Capable Isn't Authorized

AI may be able to do the work. The harder question is who should hold the authority – and the consequences.

Don Long · Founder, SummitMark · Helping people and organizations become capable with AI



*Capability can cross a threshold. Authority and responsibility still need an owner.*

Gates's "Human Reserved" idea asks what society may choose to keep human. Inside a company, the related question is who may decide - and who answers when the decision causes harm.



## 01 / THE IDEA

# A new name for an old question.

Bill Gates's August essay proposes a "Human Reserved" domain: work society might keep for people even when AI can perform it. His reasons include preserving the human value of some work and giving workers time to adapt when displacement comes quickly. In a follow-up interview, he describes both permanent and transitional versions of the idea.

[Gates's essay](#) · [Axios interview and reporting](#)

*A system can be capable of making a decision without being the right party to own it.*

## 02 / SEPARATE THE ANSWER FROM THE AUTHORITY

Imagine an AI that reviews performance more consistently than the average manager. It gathers evidence, applies a standard, and recommends who should be let go. The recommendation may be useful. Accuracy alone does not settle whether the system should make the final decision.

Who can challenge the evidence? Who explains the decision to the employee? Who weighs context the system cannot see? And who is accountable for the outcome?

An organization can let AI analyze evidence, surface patterns, or draft options while keeping consequential decisions with a person who can explain, reconsider, and take responsibility. A click-through approval after the system has already decided is oversight in name only.

## TWO DIFFERENT DESIGN CHOICES

## PRESERVE HUMAN VALUE

Some work may remain human-led because the relationship or social meaning matters.

## PROTECT A TRANSITION

Other work may be protected for a time so people can adapt to disruption.

The distinction between capability and authority is this issue's application of Gates's proposal, not a framework he explicitly advances.

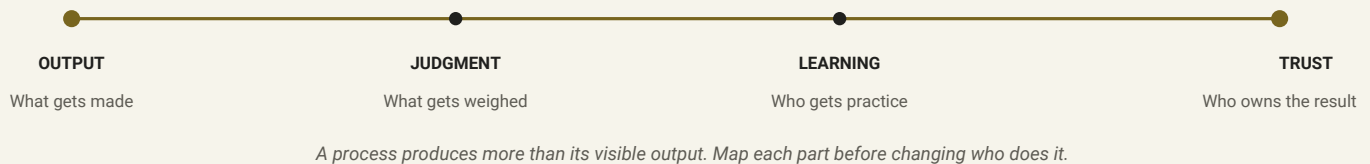


## 03 / LOOK PAST THE TASK

# What leaves with the task?

Automating one task can remove work that trained people to make better decisions later. A junior analyst's first draft may look routine. Producing it can also teach them which numbers matter, how a client's stated request differs from the real problem, and when a senior colleague rejects a technically correct answer.

A teacher does more than explain a concept. They may notice when a student withdraws or when a sudden change calls for a conversation. Replacing the lesson is not automatically the same as replacing the role.

**MAKE THE WORK VISIBLE BEFORE YOU REMOVE IT**

*This is not a case against automation. It is a case for noticing the full job before redesigning it.*

Some work has little value beyond its output; automating it can free people for better work. The point is to inventory what else the process produces: judgment, learning, accountability, trust, and relationship.

The path above is a conceptual checklist, not a measured maturity scale.



## 04 / TRY THIS ON ONE WORKFLOW

# Make the boundary real.

Decide which steps AI may perform, which decisions it may recommend, and which actions require a person with enough information and authority to say no.

- 01 What is at stake, and can the action be reversed?
- 02 What evidence and context must a person examine?
- 03 Can the affected person question or appeal the decision?
- 04 What learning or relationship disappears if the task does?
- 05 Who owns the result when the system is wrong?

*Use AI wherever it improves analysis and execution. Keep human authority where responsibility is part of the work.*

Review the boundary as the system and the work change. The useful question is not only whether AI can do the job. It is what we would lose - or become responsible for - if we let it.

**WHERE SHOULD AI ADVISE, BUT NEVER DECIDE?**

Reply with the decision and what makes the boundary matter.

*M.R.*

SOURCE: BILL GATES, "THE CHOICES WE MAKE ABOUT AI NOW ARE CRITICAL" (AUG. 26, 2026); AXIOS INTERVIEW (AUG. 26, 2026). THE CHECKLIST IS EDITORIAL GUIDANCE, NOT A VALIDATED RISK INSTRUMENT.